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SUBJECT: CAREER DIP TO HEAD ECUADOR'S WASHINGTON EMBASSY

Classified By: Ambassador Kristie A. Kenney, Reason 1.4 (b)

11. (C) SUMMARY: President Lucio Gutierrez told the Ambassador on December 2 that he would nominate MFA Bilateral U/S Roberto Betancourt to head Ecuador's embassy in Washington. The career diplomat will replace political appointee Ambassador Raul Gangotena, who submitted his resignation November 30. Betancourt has not been an ally on issues of USG interest in the past but, unlike Gangotena, he enjoys excellent relations with Foreign Minister Patricio Zuzulanda. We believe it would be counter-productive to deny agreement and recommend instead that Washington officials seek to engage Betancourt early on key bilateral issues, such as ongoing FTA talks and stalled Article 98 negotiations. Biodata appears in Paragraph 7. END SUMMARY.

12. (C) FM Zuzulanda called the Ambassador on November 29 to preview the replacement of Gangotena with a "more dynamic" career diplomat, saying President Gutierrez had suggested we be informed before making the change public. The Ambassador expressed regret and praised Gangotena as an ally on the FTA. The next day, Gangotena called the Ambassador to inform her that he had submitted his resignation at the FM's request, understanding the need of the president for flexibility building political coalitions at home. He later spoke to the press, which reported Gangotena's respect for the president's need for "utmost flexibility in personnel matters."

13. (C) Gutierrez told the Ambassador and DCM at a December 2 working breakfast that he would nominate Roberto Betancourt, the MFA's Number 3, to head Ecuador's mission in Washington. The key position required a professional diplomat, the president believed, skilled in negotiation and well-versed in trade matters. Betancourt fit the bill.

14. (C) The Ambassador thanked the president and offered Embassy assistance in the agreement process. She regretted the resignation of Gangotena, noting that Gangotena was a credit to the GoE's diplomatic corps, and would be missed.

15. (C) COMMENT: Like most MFA diplomats, Betancourt is polished and professional. Unfortunately, he also shares with his colleagues less attractive attributes, namely a 1960s-era anti-Americanism and enduring skepticism of USG motives. As Ecuador's Article 98 POC, for example, he steadfastly skirted good faith negotiations, preferring to seek waivers instead. Similarly, as the Foreign Ministry's FTA coordinator, he earned the ire of our U.S. Trade Representative colleagues for diversionary tactics.

16. (C) Seeking the silver lining in this nomination, we are left with Betancourt's close relations with boss Zuzulanda. Although neither would admit problems, it was an open secret the FM and Ambassador Gangotena rarely spoke, much less coordinated on policy. We feel assured that Washington entreaties toward the new Ecuadorian envoy will quickly reach Quito. As a skilled and trusted diplomat, Betancourt will likely be trusted to engage on the substance of key bilateral issues, including Article 98 and the FTA. The Foreign Ministry has already requested agreement; despite Betancourt's previous unhelpfulness, we believe it counterproductive to reject the request. To temper negative attitudes and make bilateral progress, we recommend Washington officials reach out to Betancourt early and often. END COMMENT.

17. (U) BIOGRAPHICAL DATA: Roberto Betancourt Ruales, 54, entered Ecuador's diplomatic academy in 1969. After graduation, he earned an advanced degree in economics from Quito's Catholic University, studied regional development at the Federal University in Belem, Brazil, and attended the Chilean government's diplomatic school. His resume highlights both bilateral and multilateral assignments; Betancourt has served in Ecuador's embassies in Chile, Uruguay, and Colombia, as well as in its UN, WTO, FAO, and Andean Community of Nations (CAN) missions. Before assuming his current role as chief of bilateral affairs, he headed the MFA's multilateral office and was Ecuador's FTAA head of delegation.

KENNEY